

CIRIEC Transversal Research Project 2016-2018

The hybrid public-economy / social-economy organisations and the issues of the development of commons and global public goods

A possible complementarity serving public policies heralding a paradigm shift?

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Recent decades have been characterised not only by the increasing currency of liberal economic conceptions and their worldwide ascendancy in public policy. They were also the decades that saw the emergence of issues of the reworking of economic analysis and public policies on the basis of potential future opportunities of producing global public or common goods (or "commons").

To respond to the global issues of sustainable development the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) of the 1990s therefore advocated rethinking public policies with the support of the concept of global public goods (Kaul et al., 1999). The concept of global public goods originates in that of the public goods of standard economic theory, which holds that the double characteristic of non-exclusion and non-rivalry of consumption of certain goods calls for public action in order to compensate the market failures that induce the insufficiency of their production (and thereby limit access to their consumption). However, the UNDP broadens the standard approach by not restraining this need for production under the protection of the public authorities solely to the technical characteristics of consumption of certain goods. It also confers on public goods social characteristics that necessitate their production for socio-political reasons, to meet the needs of equity (Ballet, 2008) between countries, populations and citizens of the world. And the UNDP thus calls attention to the necessary participation of all concerned in the decision-making process and the distribution of the benefits of public goods (Thoyer, 2011). The approach nonetheless fights shy of the possible role of organisations, more particularly the hybrid organisations (that is, organisations in a position to pursue sometimes compelling general-interest missions and to satisfy commercial considerations), of the public economy and the social economy, in this process of implementing the production of global public goods. By way of example, the choices made as regards public action to prevent global warming are largely based worldwide on the creation of pollution rights markets, and by that very fact on a fundamentally commercial rootedness of public policy, the results of which now appear, after nearly two decades of implementation, not very convincing at all. The production of

public services, public enterprises and, in a more general way, the role of structures with capacity allowing the public authorities to implement or steer policies towards sustainable development and the improvement of the well-being of populations are currently being rethought.

At the same time the works of Ostrom and her disciples have sparked increasing interest through their focus on the merits of common goods and by giving the lie to the theory of the tragedy of commons: they show that commons are a source of wise management of the resource in allowing, for instance, the development of participation-driven actions espousing non-commercial principles, actions with territorial proximity designed to meet the needs of populations. The common is here in fact defined as a good displaying three main features: the sharing of the resource, the nature of the rights and obligations linking the participants and, finally, a form of governance allowing participants to ensure respect, over time, of the system of rights and obligations that regulate it (Coriat, 2015). So, the common is a good shared for itself, the product of individual interactions ensuring the sound governance of organisations; while the global public good is accessible to all for the purposes of the general interest, without necessarily being the object of a form of governance allowing the resource to be managed efficiently. Ostrom and her disciples thus see the management of the resource by the common as a higher form of property, arguing against the theory of property rights that upholds the intrinsic superiority of private property. However, as Weinstein points out (in Coriat, 2015), this type of affirmation is still insufficiently supported, and there are also questions to be answered about the capacity of the common to be able to lead to, one, the discarding of the commercial development logics of contemporary economy and, two, meeting the needs of an active production of global public goods and managing them efficiently in order to contribute towards sustainable development. The commons, moreover, occupy a small space in today's economy and, if they happen to acquire greater importance in the future, there is also the risk of their drifting off and becoming absorbed by the traditional commercial market.

Rather than argue in terms of supremacy of one form of property over the other, would it perhaps not be more appropriate to consider the deployment of public policies that might contribute to the extension of the joint production of commons and global public goods side-by-side with private production, according to methods of governance designed to meet the expectations of sustainable development? Seen thus, are the public-economy and social-economy organisations the structures best placed to accommodate collective action with a view to effective internalisation of the needs of the general interest? The object of this research project is consequently to analyse the potentialities, rules and procedures for the complementarity of public and social economy organisations in the context of the emergence of a world order allowing the assertion of the prerogatives of the general interest *via* an enlarged production of commons and global public goods.

The research could proceed in that direction through the creation of secondary working groups investigating, for example, the following questions:

- 1) What types of scenarios alternative to the paradigm of the commercial economy can the hybrid public-economy / social-economy organisations offer as regards the production of commons and global public goods?
- 2) How differentiate and articulate the role of (a) global public goods and common goods and (b) organisations of the public economy and the social economy in their respective capacities to attain public sustainable development objectives?
- 3) How might, or should, public policies be redirected so as to stimulate or facilitate joint action between public-economy and social-economy organisations and contribute towards the development of production of commons and global public goods; and, in this respect, how rework the general-interest policies at local, national or supranational scale?
- 4) How conceive, or rethink, governance of public-economy and social-economy organisations as regards sustainable development at local and/or global scale, shortening production circuits, relocation of economic activity and boosting long-term investment?
- 5) How place public-economy and social-economy organisations in complementarity and synergy through playing on their respective specific characters; and how bring each type of organisation around to internalise as effectively as possible the logics of the general interest and sustainable development?

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